

First Woodward International Playwriting Prize Goes to New Yorker

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New York-based playwright Chantal Bilodeau is the winner of the first Woodward International Playwriting Prize

The University of New Hampshire Department of Theatre and Dance announces that the winning play of the first Woodward International Playwriting Prize is “Sila” by Canadian playwright Chantal Bilodeau.

“The Woodward Prize competition has allowed the Department of Theatre and Dance to play a significant role in bringing international culture and awareness to the university community. With plays coming in from all over the globe, it also has helped project UNH as an important center for new works of art worldwide,” said David Kaye, associate professor of theatre at UNH and chair of the Woodward Prize selection committee.

“Sila” examines the competing interests shaping the future of the Canadian Arctic and local Inuit population. Set on Baffin Island in the territory of Nunavut, it follows a climate scientist, an Inuit activist and her daughter, two Canadian Coast Guard officers, an Inuit elder and two polar bears as they see their values challenged and their lives become intricately intertwined. Equal parts Inuit myth and contemporary Arctic policy, “Sila” uses puppetry, projections, spoken word poetry, and three different languages, English, French and Inuktitut.

“ ‘Sila’ was singled out because it not only offered a fascinating understanding of a culture UNH students know very little about, but it did so in a wholly original theatrical way, mixing dialogue, poetry and Inuit myth into a powerful and important story,” Kaye said.

The UNH production of “Sila” will run during the 2013-2014 main stage season and will be directed by Deborah Kinghorn, associate professor of theater and dance. The production will be co-sponsored by the UNH Sustainability Institute. Bilodeau will receive a cash prize of \$5,000, plus expenses to travel to UNH and stay for the one week of performances.

There also will be public readings of the two runners up plays -- “A Far Shore” by Douglas Huff of India and “White Flag” by Ebru Gokdag of Turkey -- during the 2013/14 academic year. The Woodward Prize selection committee received 148 submissions representing playwrights from North, Central and South America, Asia, Africa, Australia, and Europe.

“I am thrilled to be the recipient of the first Woodward International Playwriting Prize. I have only experienced ‘Sila’ through readings so seeing the play fully realized will be an incredible treat,” playwright Chantal Bilodeau said.

“In addition, it is significant to me that the production will be co-sponsored by the UNH Sustainability Institute. ‘Sila’ looks at the intersection of economic, scientific, political and cultural interests in the Canadian Arctic. The play is very much a plea for increased collaboration in our dealings with climate change. The fact that the UNH production is a collaboration between two types of entities -- artistic and scientific -- that don't typically work together reinforces the theme present in the play and provides a great example for others to follow,” Bilodeau said.

The purpose of the Woodward International Playwriting Prize is to promote a deeper understanding of international cultures through a competition for plays addressing relevant themes. The competition is funded through Cultural Stages: The Woodward International Drama and Dance Initiative. The project is funded by Ellis Woodward, UNH Class of '74.

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